

October 5, 2014

“Connecting With Christ’s People”

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church
John 13:1-17

You know how they say that everybody has their own unique talents and abilities? And that everybody is good at something? It turns out that I’m really good at this board game, *Scrabble Junior*. Last week, at our Wednesday Night Alive dinner, after eating my macaroni and cheese, I challenged two kids and a grandmother who were sitting near me to a game of *Scrabble Junior*. And I’m proud to say that I won the game. Now, the fact that it says on the box “ages 5 and up” does nothing to lessen the pride I take in my victory.

What was great about the game we played, though, wasn’t that I won. It was that four of us got to know each other a little bit. Player 1 was a 9-year old boy who’s brand new to Hope, and his parents are in the New Member Class this fall. Player 2 is a 9-year old girl who’s a member of the church, but she didn’t know either of the other players; and she had no idea that her pastor was so good at *Scrabble Junior*. Player 3 is a woman who was just visiting our church on Wednesday, bringing her grandson who goes to Confirmation at Hope; and she didn’t know anybody. Well, I talked them into playing a cutthroat game of *Scrabble Junior*, and the four of us ended up making some connections.

And all around the building, on Wednesday night, there were other people making connections. Families eating dinner together, and meeting other families ... the Men’s group cooking up a storm, and serving it with a smile ... our 95 Confirmation students learning about the Lord’s Prayer and then talking it over in their 14 small groups ... the handbell choirs and Senior Choir and Youth Praise Team making

beautiful music to the glory of God ... adults in Bible study classes ... kids and youth in their kids and youth events ... people of all ages talking, fellowshiping, studying, volunteering, praying, singing, smiling, laughing, eating, learning, playing super-challenging board games. Wednesday nights here at Hope is a powerful time for connecting with Christ's people.

But not just Wednesday nights, of course -- Sunday mornings, Saturday evenings, and all through the week. Our Savior Jesus is calling all of us to follow him, to live out our faith 24/7 as Christian disciples ... and one very important aspect of discipleship is connecting with Christ's people.

On Wednesday morning, I happened to speak on the phone with one of our church members, a man named Rick. He gave me permission to share this conversation with you. Rick has a unique perspective on this topic of connecting with Christ's people, because he has a new job driving a truck all across the country. He was telling me the other day how much he misses his church, and misses the people here. "I've always especially enjoyed getting to meet people who are new to the church, and hearing their stories," Rick said. "We all tend to get into our own little circles, get with our own crew, and we feel we're good to go. But it's so important," Rick told me, "to move beyond our normal boundaries, and reach out to others. We should never underestimate at Hope," he added, "the strength and the power of connectivity."

And he's 100% right. Whether it's welcoming people, talking to strangers, sharing a meal, playing a friendly board game, or just sharing a smile and a handshake at the beginning of service, we should never underestimate the power of connectivity here at Hope. The connectivity we have here is powerful. It is palpable. Visitors notice it. Newcomers pick up

on it. Long-time members cherish it. And we all need to work at it, nurture it, take ownership of it, and put our own personal stamp on the connectivity level around here.

Today Jesus shows us one more specific way that wants us to connect with his people: serving. This is a hard one, isn't it? Serving others ... I don't mind hanging out with people, and sharing a meal with them. I'm happy to talk about service to other people in Christ's name. I'm even OK donating money to support others who are providing service in Christ's name. But does Jesus really expect me to serve others myself? Is the Lord truly asking Christians like us to step out of our own comfort zone, to get down on our own knees, and to serve other people ourselves in his name?

Well, that's exactly what Jesus did, at the Last Supper. Gathered for a festive Passover meal on the night before he was crucified, Jesus shocked his disciples by crawling on the floor and washing their dirty feet. Normally a lowly servant tackled this demeaning job; but that night Jesus did the servant's chore. And the next day he did it again – humbly serving a whole world of dirty, soul-soiled sinners by giving up his life on a cross.

And, friends, this serving – this putting others first, this humble way of living -- this is the way of Christ. This is the way he wants us to live. This is the kind of disciple Jesus wants to have in his church, to have in this church. The Lord wants you and me to see the value in connecting with Christ's people, even if it means serving them.

Jesus said to his disciples that night, after he had finished washing their peds, *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you"* (vs. 14-15).

So here at Hope we are to follow Christ's example. We connect with Christ's people. We reach out, we extend ourselves, we make friends, we step out of that box. We even serve others in Jesus' name.

So I challenge you to get involved with our Touched By Hope ministry, our Hope Friends Ministry, our Adopt-A-Highway program, our Mission Trips, our Read and Feed ministry, and similar serving programs at Hope.

But it's not just church programs. We can all serve others in the Lord's name as individuals, too. Discipleship, after all, is a way of life. Jesus wants our whole lives to be lived for him, just as he lived and died for us. *"I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you"* (v. 15).

May Christ's undying love move us to connect with Christ's people, and to serve them in Jesus' name. Amen.